





THE SAINT'S HOPE IN DEATH

A

{ 15.07
5653

SERMON,

PREACHED AT

THE FUNERAL OF

MRS. SALLY S. WHITCOMB,

OF SWEDEN, (ME.) MARCH 19, 1848.

BY REV. DAVID GARLAND.

PORTLAND.

PRINTED AT THE MIRROR OFFICE.

1848.

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2012 with funding from
Congregational Library of the American Congregational Association

SERMON.

PROV. xiv: 32.—BUT THE RIGHTEOUS HATH HOPE IN HIS DEATH.

THE Scriptures apply the word righteous to true believers in Christ. Those are designated by this term, who have experienced a radical change from sin to holiness. They were dead in trespasses and sins, but have been brought to life in Christ by the Spirit of God. And they are made to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that, in the ages to come, God might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness towards them through Christ Jesus. They exist in this world, but they are not of it. They are not its favorites, neither are they enamored with its pageantry. They are called, and chosen out of it, and born^{ed} from it. They are the people of God, and the world knows them not, because it knows Him not. They are indeed strangers and pilgrims in the earth; they belong to the kingdom of light, which consisteth not in meats and in drinks, but in righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost, and they hope in the hour of death to be members of that kingdom and another life.

All men, while in health and prosperity, hope to enjoy a future state of happiness. They cannot endure the thought of being eternally separated from God. They would not be left to eat forever of the fruit of their own way, and to be filled with their own devices. But death puts the hope of all men to a severe test. They are then inclined to deal honestly with their own souls. They think seriously of their future state of exist-

ence, and review their past course of life with careful study and with diligent research. For well know, says a heathen writer, that when one supposes himself to be near the point of death, then enter his soul fear and anxieties respecting things before unheeded. He looks back upon his past life, and if he finds in its records many sins, like one starting from a frightful dream, he is terrified and filled with foreboding fears. The hour of death is indeed a solemn and a trying period in man's existence. He is then to be speedily ushered into the immediate presence of God, and he is either more or less solicitous about his future well being. The good man's hope endures the terrors of death and vivid thoughts of the judgment to come, like as the pure gold endures the intense heat of the furnace-fire. He continues composed to the end. His hope is an anchor to the soul. And he can lean his head upon the bosom of his Saviour, and there calmly and sweetly breathe out his life.

The event which has called us together, naturally suggests a consideration of the elements of a good man's hope in the hour of death. And,

I. He has a consciousness of loving God supremely. Even the devoted Christian frequently doubts, whether he possesses supreme love to God. The deceitful and ensnaring objects of this world address themselves so forcibly to his senses, that he is often carried away captive by their beguiling influences. He becomes involved in clouds of darkness. His love of the world occasions him many serious doubts, and anxious fears respecting his intimate friendship with God. But as he approaches near the hour of death, these doubts and fears gradually vanish away. The carnal, sensual objects of earth lose their charm for him. He, with the wise king, can truly say, vanity of vanities, all is vanity. His heart becomes divested of all affections that savor of idolatry. The clouds of darkness which often came over his mind, now disappear. He has clear visions of his Saviour, and beholds excellences in his character which fill his soul with great

joy. He may be strongly wedded to his earthly friends, and drop a tear of sorrow as they, weeping, gather around his dying bed. But he loves his Redeemer infinitely more. And he even rejoices, when he hears the watchman's cry : Arise ! behold, the bridegroom cometh ; go ye out to meet him. He immediately trims and lights his lamp, which is already filled with oil. He is wedded to his Saviour by strong ties of holy fellowship, which are infinitely dearer to him than all that this world calls great and good. And he can truly say, O death ! where is thy sting ? O grave ! where is thy victory ? He beholds the golden sceptre of peace extended ; and he anxiously waits for the period to arrive, when the soul shall disenrobe itself of its cumbersome casement of dust, so that he can go into the immediate presence of his God.

II. The good man in the hour of death has a consciousness that his sins are forgiven of God. The Christian, while engrossed in the busy scenes of this life, often doubts whether he has obtained free forgiveness for his violations of the divine law. He can scarcely believe it possible, that so great a sinner as himself can find pardon of God. The higher attainments he makes in holiness, and the greater knowledge he acquires of God, the more does he see of his own guilt. He views his heart as a fountain that is defiled with sin. The more thoroughly he tests his course of life by the immaculate purity of the moral law, the more loathsome does his vileness appear in his own sight. And afflicted, and made sorrowful by the evil workings of the sin that dwelleth in him, he is constrained to give utterance to his feelings in the language of Paul : O wretched man that I am ! who shall deliver me from the body of this death ? Sin, in his view, seems well nigh to have gained dominion over him. And he has fears lest, that, after having recommended the gospel of Christ to others, and instructed them in the ways of righteousness, he shall be condemned as an unprofitable servant. But as he approaches near the end of his earthly existence, he has a

consciousness, that he has been delivered from the penalty of the violated law. He looks back upon his past life, and finds in its records many sins which he has committed. But he is not terrified and dismayed, like one starting from a frightful dream. He may have feelings of sadness and of grief, when he recalls to mind the manifold ways in which he has done violence to the moral law. But he is cheered by the thought that his Redeemer has met the demands of the violated law. He has a consciousness that, though his sins have been as scarlet, they have now become as white as snow ; and that, though they have been red like crimson, they have now become as wool. He has an inward evidence that their deep polluting stain has been entirely removed by the merits of his Saviour's atoning blood. He does not shudder at the thought of falling into the hands of an infinitely just God. His faith in the efficacy of Christ's sufferings and death grows firmer and firmer, the nearer he approaches the judgment seat. His Redeemer discloses himself to him the more clearly as he is about to enter the dark valley and the shadow of death. And he cheers him in his passage by the assurance that his sins have all been forgiven.

III. The good man, in the hour of death, has a consciousness that he shall enter upon an unending state of happiness, when he departs this life. He has well nigh a sure evidence that he shall abide the test of the divine tribunal, when all the world shall appear before the judgment seat of Christ. Doubtless there is not a Christian, however holy he may live, but what has doubts whether he shall be happy in his future state of being. The devoted follower of the Redeemer discovers so much imperfection in himself, and comes so far short of fulfilling his obligations to God, that he often trembles when he looks forward to another life. He can scarcely believe that he, an erring, sinful creature, shall ever be crowned with a blessed immortality. There is a constant warfare in his mind between light and darkness. While he would do good, evil is present with him. He

may through most of his life delight in the law of God after the inward man. But he finds another law in his members, warring against the law of his mind, and bringing him into captivity to the law of sin. His visions of a future state of happiness are often obscured by clouds of darkness. He endures the gloominess of many a dark night. But as he approaches the hour of death, he beholds the dawning light of an eternal day. His views of another state of existence grow brighter, the nearer he arrives to the end of life. He has a consciousness of being prepared to mingle in the society of the angels. He knows in whom he has believed. And trusting for eternal salvation to the merits of Christ, he can sincerely say, I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me in that day. He is made a partaker of the joys of the world to come, before he enters into the conflict with death. His hope of reaching heaven is well nigh superseded by sight, before he leaves his tabernacle of earth. He is in a straight betwixt two. He would prefer to depart and be with Christ. He would desire to tarry longer in this world of sin and suffering, only that he might be of service to the present and eternal well-being of our afflicted race. It is in his heart to enter upon a state of unmixed happiness, where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest. His views of the reward that awaits him in another life, are glorious beyond description. All doubts and fears are removed from his mind. He has an inward evidence of his speedy and complete victory over sin and death. The elements of a good man's hope in the hour of death, are a consciousness that he loves God supremely, that his sins are forgiven of God, and that he shall enter upon a state of unending happiness when he departs this life.

Such were the elements of her hope, whose mortal remains now lie before us. She was loved most as a Christian, by those

who knew her best. She had been a professor of the Christian religion nearly twenty-five years. And it might well be said of her, she did what she could. There were united in her various milder graces, which are fitted to give completeness to, and to adorn a female Christian character. She possessed a spirit of meekness, humility, charity, gentleness and patience. Her course of life was like the path of the just, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day. She delighted to mingle with the people of God, and was ever in her seat in the sanctuary on the Sabbath, when circumstances would allow of her attendance on the ordinances of the gospel. She was a faithful Samaritan. She turned neither to the right nor to the left, when an object of charity addressed itself to her sympathy. When she saw one of our suffering race, either hungry, or thirsty, or naked, or sick, she was attentive to his wants, and administered support and consolation. Her life was a life of hardships, and of self denials. But she walked with God, and daily communed with him, as a man communeth with his friend. All her trials and deprivations, which are incident to this mortal state of existence, were endured with Christian fortitude. She was faithful in her Master's service. But she is now gone. All of her, that can die, is now dead. She is gathered to her fathers. And we trust she is now in the immediate presence of her God, whom she loved and delighted to serve.

You, Sir, the companion of the deceased, need not this day be reminded of her excellent traits of character. I only express the united testimony of a large circle of fellow citizens, when I say, she was an affectionate and devoted wife, and a wise counsellor. You have enjoyed her society forty-one years. She has been to you a source of much happiness in sickness, in worldly adversity, and in matters of religion. She, for years—as we trust—has been in possession of heavenly wisdom, that rare virtue, which is enjoyed but by a very small portion of our race. And this she has exhibited in all her plans and purposes re-

specting your earthly good, and your eternal interests. It is the possession of this incomparable virtue, that renders one of our race an object of veneration, and of special interest. We have, within a few weeks, seen this truth fully corroborated by the exhibition of our nation's respect for a great and good public servant. It was his great excellence of moral character, which won for himself universal love. This same truth is verified in the humbler walks of life. Very many will mourn over the loss of virtue, which has been occasioned by the death of your wife. You have now been deprived of the richest earthly gift that was ever conferred upon man. God has come and taken her away with a stroke. She was his not only by creation, but by adoption. The image of his Son was impressed upon her. And he now, in his infinite wisdom, has recalled her into his immediate presence, where there is fullness of joy. You have no just cause to murmur, or to complain at his dealings with you. For his ways are not as man's ways, neither are his thoughts as man's thoughts. He only lent her to you as a rich blessing, for a few years, reserving to himself the exclusive right to recall her whenever the event should conduce to your good, her happiness, and his glory. And he has done it. And now dry up your tears. Remember, that you are but a few steps behind your companion. How soon these will be taken you know not. They will very shortly be numbered. And if you are faithful to your divine Master, you will soon meet her in paradise. Be resigned to the will of God, and wait patiently, until your time shall come. That Saviour, who was your companion's support in the last hours of her life, and removed all terrors of death from her mind, is waiting to be gracious. Trust in him for a few days ; yield cheerfully to his will, and you will then be far away from all scenes of grief and mourning.

You, children of the deceased, have this day rather an occasion to praise God for his goodness in his dealings with you, than to mourn over the death of your beloved parent. You should

this day be grateful to Him for continuing to you such a virtuous, godly mother, until you, and all your brothers and sisters had arrived to manhood, and to womanhood. She did what she could to mould your characters after the pattern of Christ. She felt much interested in your worldly good. She had strong natural affections. But she felt far more anxious about your eternal well-being. She could truly say, I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth. She offered up many prayers for you. And doubtless He, who hears and answers the entreaties of the righteous, listened to her devout supplications. But now she is taken from you. Elijah's God was her God. And He, as we trust, has taken her to heaven—not by a chariot of whirlwind, but by some guardian angel. May He grant, that her mantle of grace and holy love shall descend upon you. Imitate the godly examples of your mother; follow in her footsteps, so far as she followed Christ. Dry up your weeping eyes. Go to the Infinite Source of consolation. Be diligent in business and fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; and hold yourself in readiness for the coming of the Son of man.

And what shall I say to little Sarah, who, in the providence of God, has been made once fatherless, and twice motherless? May the broad and impenetrable shield of His infinite love protect her from all the enticements of this sinful world. May some ministering spirit be sent to guide her in the path of truth and virtue. You who are now to have the tutelage of this child, forget her not. Neglect yourself, rather than neglect her. Give her all the literary, and moral, and religious education possible. Suffer her not to be cast off into this cold, selfish world, friendless. You well know how much she was interested in her good, whose remains now lie before us. And now manifest your great respect for her, by exercising special care over the object which she so much loved.

You, the sister of the deceased, must naturally feel, to-day, like a stranger in a strange land. You have here neither brother

nor sister to sympathise with you in this sad bereavement. But there is One who is to you as an elder brother. Although he is unseen, yet he is every where present. Think, this day, of the scene at the grave of Lazarus. Recall to mind the language of the Jews, Behold how he loved him! Jesus exhibited his love for Martha and Mary, by his deep sympathy for them in their affliction. He is the same sympathiser now. Seek consolation in this hour of trial from Him. Go to Him, and He will be to you more than the friendship of a beloved sister. Let all the friends of the deceased profit by this dispensation of divine providence. Remember that you are mortal, and must soon follow the departed to the world of spirits. Be ye also ready, for in such an hour as ye think not, the Son of man cometh.

The church of which the deceased was a member has now lost one of its pillars. There will be one seat vacant in the sanctuary on the Sabbath, in the church-meetings, and around the table of Christ. Let the surviving members be admonished, by this stroke of providence, to be more faithful. Be much in prayer. Seek for that wisdom which cometh from above. Know nothing among men but Christ, and him crucified.

This whole assembly beholds in the death of the deceased, the end of the righteous. Remember that the wicked is driven away in his wickedness ; but that the righteous hath hope in his death. May this event convince you that it is of necessity you should prepare to meet God. If you would die the death of the wicked, and like him be driven away from the presence of God, you have only to live the life of the wicked. But if you would die the death of the righteous, you must live the life of the righteous. Be not ashamed of Christ in this world of sin and suffering, and he will not be ashamed of you when he shall come in the glory of his Father. Remember, that "we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that every one may receive of the things done in the body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad." Let this truth be so indelibly en-

graven upon your hearts and your consciences, that you will secure to yourselves the hope of the righteous, die in the triumphs of faith, and enter into that rest which remaineth for the people of God.

